

# The Value of Design<sup>1</sup>

By Gorm Gabrielsen, Tore Kristensen and Judith Zaichkowsky

## Abstract

A series of experimental conjoint designs were used to test how people evaluate preferences when selecting with actual visual design information, selecting with the origin or brand information added, and then selecting when primed that one of the choices is a 'designer' or a special choice. Evaluations were repeated within each experiment adding actual prices as a conjoint variable.

The experiments were conducted in various shopping malls in a large European city. Computers were set up with the self-directed conjoint program and the actual goods (rice paper lamps) were displayed alongside the computer station so the respondents could look, touch, and even feel the tactility of the lamps if they wished. The respondents (135) were selected randomly as they were attracted to the stand in the malls and lobbies.

These three experiments vary the information to the respondents, starting with the mere designs, adding information about one lamp being identified by a name and extending this to naming all lamps and finally explaining that one lamp was designed by a Japanese sculptor, Isamu Noguchi. For each set of information, the preferences, guesses of identification and buying intentions were tested. The designs themselves clearly contain information. Still, it was seen that each incremental addition of information changed the perception, preferences and buying intentions of the respondents. The design knowledge was a strong issue when matched with a superior design. But even with limited knowledge, the design dominated the name effect, which could be interpreted as a brand effect, although only slightly.

Consumer choice in the marketplace is heavily influenced by brand names and price. However design has reemerged as a major force in marketing and is perhaps the most difficult product attribute to manage. The variables of brand name and "Designer" are shown to shift preferences. Additionally we find that consumers will shift their preferences to designs they believe are "designer" brands, even when the actual design may not be so attractive without that information.

The business implications of this are straightforward: First the design must be good. Then the marketing effort is best utilized when it addresses a design competent audience. This means, for instance, using the right channels of distributions, outlets and communication channels. And finally, the effect will be reinforced when supported by good branding.

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<sup>1</sup> International Conference on Design Principles, London